



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

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## Fire Island National Seashore News Release

**Release date:** Immediate

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**Phone number:** 631 289-4810 x 221

**Date:** May 7, 2004

**Release code:** 04-02

### Piping Plovers Return to Fire Island; National Park Service Restricts Pets and Kites on Some Fire Island Beaches

*Patchogue, NY*—The first plover egg of the 2004 season was recorded on Fire Island on April 28<sup>th</sup>. In hopes of continuing last year's success rate with its threatened and endangered species, Fire Island National Seashore has closed portions of its beaches to pets and kites. From May 1 through September 1, pets are not permitted at the following Fire Island National Seashore locations:

- On the ocean beach from the east boundary of Robert Moses State Park to the Village of Kismet.
- On the ocean beach between the western and eastern designated dune crossings in the Sailors Haven area (which is part of the Sunken Forest Preserve).
- From the westernmost dune crossing of the Otis Pike Wilderness Area west to the Old Long Cove cut east of Watch Hill.

The restriction may be lifted earlier if all chicks have fledged. Pets are not permitted at any time on life guarded beaches at Watch Hill and Sailors Haven.

The park began preparing for the return of the piping plover in late March. Some restrictions on beach driving were implemented by March 15. By April 1, symbolic fencing had been installed on portions of the beach that produced successful nests last year or that met the criteria for desirable plover breeding habitat.

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As nests are established, park staff and volunteers construct protective enclosures to keep predators away from the eggs. Once nest-building and egg-laying begins, the National Park Service restricts pets, except seeing eye dogs, and kite-flying on designated section of the ocean beach.

Piping plover mating usually occurs from late March through early June. Plovers generally lay one egg every other day until they reach a complete clutch of four eggs. The eggs are incubated for about 25 days. Once hatched, chicks fledge, or fly from the nest, in about 35 days. Most nesting activity has ceased by mid-August and the birds fly south for the winter.

Until the chicks are able to fly, residents and visitors to Fire Island National Seashore are asked to respect the closed areas set up to protect these birds. Dogs and people running through enclosed areas may crush eggs and chicks. Flying kites and flags may resemble a hovering hawk and frighten chicks and adults, forcing them to abandon their nests. By leaving your dogs and kites at home when you make your trek to the beach, you help enhance the protection of rare, threatened, or endangered bird species. Beach closures also protect endangered plants within the symbolic fencing.

Fire Island National Seashore has been monitoring and protecting its five federally listed threatened and endangered species since 1986. Last year—2003—was the most productive season recorded since monitoring began. Park biologists recorded 20 breeding pairs of piping plovers, which fledged 35 plover chicks. Less successful were the 52 breeding pairs of least terns, which only produced a single chick. An entire tern colony was destroyed due to predation and loss of habitat. On one of the small islands near Fire Island, 2 breeding pairs of roseate terns were seen, but the outcome of their nesting was not determined.

Three portions of the Fire Island shoreline were renourished over the winter, adding more than a million cubic yards of sand to beaches in front of some communities and Smith Point County Park. The Fire Island communities that paid for the dredging are required to protect a percentage of the reclaimed beach for endangered species habitat. Symbolic fencing and enclosures may be encountered on those beaches also. Fire Island National Seashore's Acting Superintendent Barry Sullivan stated, "We hope that the additional closed areas and the new beach will help us see another successful year. Last year's level of cooperation was truly appreciated."



Symbolic fencing (string between poles, marked with orange flagging) is installed as plovers begin to return to suitable nesting areas. After eggs are laid, staff and volunteers construct a protective enclosure around each nest. Hat covers nest, above, to protect eggs while work is quickly completed. NPS Photo

For further information about this project or about Fire Island National Seashore, call (631) 289-4810, or visit the park web site at [www.nps.gov/fiis](http://www.nps.gov/fiis).

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